

Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project
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Randall Rodriguez
Student, University of Washington
Grocery Store Worker
Member, UFCW 21

Narrator: Randall Rodriguez

Interviewers: Marshall Bender

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MARSHALL BENDER 00:00:17

Hello, this is Marshall Bender, a UW (University of Washington) student, interviewing Randall Rodriguez, a fellow UW student and essential worker for the Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project. In this interview, we will be discussing the effects of COVID-19 on workers in the United States. This is a remote interview and I am in Seattle, Washington, and Randall is also in Seattle, Washington. Before we begin Randall, can I please confirm that I have your permission to record this interview and to share it with the general public?

RANDALL RODRIGUEZ 00:00:47

Yes, you do.

MARSHALL 00:00:49

All right. Now that we begin, Randall, could you introduce yourself? How old are you? Where were you born?

RANDALL 00:00:58

Hi, my name is Randall Rodriguez. I was originally born in California. I'm forty years old. I use he/him pronouns.

MARSHALL 00:01:14

Could you also tell us the race or ethnicity you identify as and how important this is to your background? In addition, any social, political, racial, religious communities that you are connected with?

RANDALL 00:01:26

I am a Chicane man. I don't know if I would say it's incredibly important. It's something that I--My heritage is something that I struggle trying to identify with. I think that's something common with the Chicane experience, always trying to find our place in society or something like that. I am a UFCW 21 (United Food and Commercial Workers International Union) member. That's one of my, I guess we would say political and also work affiliations. What was it? What else?

MARSHALL 00:02:03

If you have any religious communities that are also connected with, if you would like to elaborate on your union participation, that'd be great as well.

RANDALL 00:02:14

I'm not a religious person. I am kind of on the outskirts, not a key member to the union. I'm a big supporter of my union. But I also don't take time and volunteer with them or anything like that. Partially because I have only been a part of the union since the pandemic started. But I'm a pro-union guy kind of through and through.

MARSHALL 00:02:48

Would you mind describing your occupational history up to today? Where did you work before the pandemic and also your current profession?

RANDALL 00:02:57

I have been a bartender and server for about twenty two and a half years prior to the pandemic. I lost both of my jobs. I was working at a place on Capitol Hill and just started at a place in White Center as a bartender when the pandemic hit, and I lost both of my jobs within about forty five minutes of each other. My partner has been a manager at a supermarket, our local grocery store for about sixteen years. She was able to get me a job working with her because they were incredibly short staffed, and I didn't have as much to do. I am technically on sabbatical at the moment from the grocery store. But that's just because school has kind of been busy. And the store has also kind of mellowed out a little bit where they don't have the same kind of hours that they need for me.

MARSHALL 00:04:03

Can you run me through a typical day at work before the pandemic?

RANDALL 00:04:08

Yeah. So I worked about--I usually worked three or four days a week, I was on the night shift, I was at that bar on Capitol Hill that I worked at. (*laughs*) I had the title of bar manager. I would do some of the training and stuff and we would hire and I was responsible for picking up and dropping off dried goods and perishable goods. In that industry, typically you get your spirits and your beer delivered to you. You don't have to send somebody to do that other stuff. Somebody has to physically go and take care of, and I used to do that. I typically worked--I would get to work about seven, seven thirty and then I would work. The shift kind of ended at around four in the morning. I was typically there till about five or six though just because I had other stuff that I had to do. Then I would come home and sleep for a few hours before I got back up. I would work weekends. I typically worked Thursday, Friday, Saturday night. Sometimes Mondays too.

MARSHALL 00:05:14

That sounds like a very long shift.

RANDALL 00:05:16

(laughs) It was a very, very long shift. It's hard to be doing almost twelve hours a day, especially when it's in the middle of the night. (laughs)

MARSHALL 00:05:24

I can only imagine. How can you say that COVID-19 has impacted your work life? I know you said that you were laid off. But, maybe in relation to your supermarket job, how would you say that COVID-19 is influenced and changed it?

RANDALL 00:05:41

The hours were definitely a lot better. (laughs) But the pay was a lot lower. I made at the grocery store about a third of what I made bartending. Although because of the union, I was able to have extra health insurance, which I had through my partner beforehand, but more health insurance, and then there's more benefits that go along with it. It was a challenging pay cut for us to deal with as a family.

MARSHALL 00:06:11

You probably relied a lot on tips at the bar.

RANDALL 00:06:15

Yeah.

MARSHALL 00:06:16

Were you able to get a hazard pay increase from the city of Seattle while working at the supermarket?

RANDALL 00:06:24

I was. But it was as a grocery worker. So it wasn't--My unemployment was related to my yearly annual income that I made from the bar. But the hazard pay was related to being a grocery worker at that point.

MARSHALL 00:06:46

When Governor Inslee designated the Stay Home, Stay Healthy order were you classified as an essential worker?

RANDALL 00:06:54

At first, no. Once I took the job at the grocery store, then I was classified as an essential worker.

MARSHALL 00:07:04

I was also very lucky to get an essential worker job, which I still have. Now I would like you to describe a work day during the pandemic. What are the changes, the difficulties, the stresses that you may have had?

RANDALL 00:07:19

(laughs) The grocery store industry, especially at the very beginning, was really challenging, because it was the one place that kind of anyone could go, and everyone could go, it was still open. It became sort of a social gathering place, but everyone was in a really heightened state of stress. It was everybody's worst experience of their lives trying to deal with what was happening personally, locally, nationally, and everything. People were at their worst, they were having the worst days of their lives as they were there. There were assaults on employees, coworkers, people trying to steal things, people freaking out because we were out of toilet paper, there was that big toilet paper thing at the beginning, too. We suffered from that also. (laughs) People really struggled with us being out of things like toilet paper. Yeast and flour was something that for like a month, we just couldn't get and couldn't keep. People had a really hard time with that too, customers especially. The store I work at has a big demographic of elderly people that shop there. They had a heightened sense of fear as they

were shopping. One of the things that we did to help curb that and we weren't able to do it right away was we implemented a curbside service where people would call in, give a list of stuff that they needed, and then we'd have someone shop for them and then take it out to their car with face shields and all kinds of things and try to keep them as safe as possible. But it took a little while to get going. Once it did get going, it was part of the new normal that started to happen at the grocery store. At first, it was really, (*laughs*) really interesting to see when everybody's having the worst day of their life, how that interaction goes.

MARSHALL 00:09:25

Did you ever have to resolve any conflicts between customers and yourself or other employees? Was there a lot of that going on besides the general freaking out?

RANDALL 00:09:37

There was a lot of that going on. That was one of the things that--It didn't affect me a whole lot. I was a last resort person when there was a big conflict going on. Some of that I think comes from my bartending history though too, where I would do that. I have a lot of experience doing that. By the time somebody is asking me for help to deal with an unruly customer or somebody who's having a bad day, or somebody who's trying to steal something, by the time they've come and asked me, things have gotten bad. Then we're basically waiting for the police to show up at that point. But that happened a few times. Usually with theft, the thing that they would ask me to come and help with, that's something that I have some experience with.

MARSHALL 00:10:26

Thank you for your answers. We're going to move on to health and safety now. At your current job were you provided with PPE (personal protective equipment) and if not, how did you obtain it?

RANDALL 00:10:39

That's an interesting one. The grocery store did provide PPE for us, but it was really challenging. At first, we weren't able to get anything. There was a huge shortage of gloves and masks. And there was a huge shortage of bags too, which was kind of a weird thing. Our employer put up some plexiglass barriers and stuff. We have a co-worker whose family is in the shipping industry, I believe in China, and nobody in the area in our part of Seattle, in our industry was able to get masks and gloves, disposable gloves, from a corporate supplier. But he was able to call in a favor from a cousin or something like that and got a shipment within a couple of weeks of gloves and masks and some other things. Some other disinfectants I think was the other thing was on that shipment. They were able to provide that for us. But we had to use some backdoor channels to do it, which I thought was interesting.

MARSHALL 00:11:57

I remember specifically that isopropyl alcohol was sold out for months.

RANDALL 00:12:02

Yeah, and what's the other--Hydrogen peroxide too. I think maybe it was alcohol was the other thing that was on that shipment. We were out of that for a while.

MARSHALL 00:12:16

Have you ever felt that your life or your health were in danger as a result of working during COVID-19?

Randall Rodriguez 00:12:21

Yes. My partner and I live with our daughter, who is about to turn twelve. We also live with her [Randall's partner] parents. We're in a multi-generational household. Both of my in-laws are high-risk individuals, so there was always a concern about that. My grandmother died of COVID-19. At one point we had a big outbreak at the

store among employees. And so that was really scary. My partner and I were able to--We have some friends who are really into camping, which I think is hideous, personally, but they love it. So they have more than one camper, like a tow-behind fifth wheel type trailer camper, and they brought one to our house and we put it in our back alley, and ran some cords out to it. My partner and I stayed in a camper for just a little bit, I think six weeks while the outbreak was happening at the store (pauses) to kind of keep everybody safe in our house.

MARSHALL 00:13:36

I'm very sorry to hear about the loss of your grandmother. It's very tragic.

RANDALL 00:13:41

It was really hard on my mom, too, because she couldn't go and be with her because of that. I think that's an experience that a lot of people have.

MARSHALL 00:13:49

Absolutely. The fact that 500,000 people and more have died is really a tragedy and something that needs to be reckoned with. Have you ever contracted COVID-19 or did you feel that you have?

RANDALL 00:14:03

No. After that outbreak at the store, we waited for the health department to give us like--You want to take this many weeks since the last outbreak or since the last confirmed case. And then go get tested. We got tested several times and kept up on that but never tested positive. I never did an antibody test. But I'm guessing I didn't.

MARSHALL 00:14:35

That's good to hear. I've also never gotten COVID-19 as far as I know. For the company you currently work for, how would you rate their response to COVID-19 as well as their support to you and your other employees? Were they effective, did they move quickly enough? Did you receive proper compensation for your labor?

RANDALL 00:14:59

That's kind of a mixed bag. I felt like our company did a really good job of health and safety protocols within the store. The other protocols that go along with that: being paid for labor, being compensated for overtime, provided scaffolding, being able to take time off and have coverage, things like that have been really bad. We've been anonymous so far. So I think it'll be alright. But recently, our owner went to all of the department heads and said, You need to figure out a way to keep the COVID-19 numbers as high as they are because the grocery industry has made a lot of money during the pandemic. That's his new charge. This person's new charge to all of the department heads is to make sure that he keeps the quarterly figures that high, which I thought was out of touch and distasteful. In the meantime, I know that the union did a lot to try to get grocery workers ahead on the vaccine list, get hazard pay and things like that. I know that's been challenging, a lot of what ended up being effective for the union wasn't necessarily collective bargaining, but pressure on local governments to do things and to have the city or the county or the state step in and do things. The Plexiglas barriers, for instance, that was something that kind of came from UFCW working with governments--Local and I think the state governments actually that they worked with, to implement those standards and get Plexiglas installed in check stands and things like that. We were part of that. There wasn't a resistance to it. Our owner wasn't like, We're not putting those things in heret. But I know that that came from the union. I don't know if that answered your question, or if I just kind of went off on a tangent there?

MARSHALL 00:17:06

No, it did. Thank you very much. It's good to hear that your union was able to support you. Did your store require masks for customers at all times? I've heard of others, large chains like Walmart, not requiring masks for customers if they choose not to. What about where you work?

RANDALL 00:17:23

We required masks for everyone. But we also had a lot of difficulty enforcing it. Most of the people in our neighborhood eventually got on board and started wearing masks. But there were a handful of people that took a while to get on board and were chastised more than once. And then there were a very, very small number of people that went and got a doctor's note and said, I'm not going to wear a mask, and still insisted on shopping at our store. That was something that I thought was odd. I've heard about Walmarts and other stores where they weren't enforcing a mask policy. And it's like, why aren't you going somewhere where they don't care? Everybody here cares. Everybody that's shopping here wants to be participating in this. So I thought that was a little bit odd. There was a little organizational inertia that took a minute to get going there. By the end, it was pretty ubiquitous that people were wearing masks.

MARSHALL 00:18:29

I've noticed that people have gotten very used to it in the past year. But also now people are getting used to not wearing them because we've been vaccinated. Have you been vaccinated? And your co-workers?

RANDALL 00:18:41

Yeah. I think the last figure I heard is that out of 200 employees, only 15 are not vaccinated. Some of them have other health issues. Almost all of us have been vaccinated, I've been vaccinated. I still wear my mask. But one, I still want to stay safe. My daughter isn't old enough to be vaccinated yet. I don't want to spread anything to her. But also, I feel there's a social cue that goes on now too, right? Because it's been eighteen months of us doing this. And there's something that says I'm wearing my mask, because I don't want something to happen to you, not so much worried about what's happening to me. I don't have a sign that says I've been vaccinated, but that's what wearing the mask is about, right. It's about not spreading something that I've done to you unwittingly.

MARSHALL 00:19:42

There's definitely this feeling of social responsibility now. I'd also say there's a deep social pressure, especially in places like Seattle, where if you're not wearing a mask, people may look at you, give you dirty looks, or say something. That's also very real. Is your store now allowing people who are vaccinated to work without a mask or shop without a mask?

RANDALL 00:20:03

I haven't been there for a few weeks, but as far as I know, no, they're still having a mask-wearing policy at this point. That might change in the next few weeks. I know that some of the vaccines--We're approaching 70 percent of people being vaccinated in the area, in the county, I think it is. And that might change when some of the other protocols shift a little bit more. The store has always erred on the side of caution with the health protocols for sure.

MARSHALL 00:20:46

Now we're going to move on to family and community. You described your cousin or friend, I believe, who brought that camper to you. That's very generous of them. Have you received any other help from your friends and family, partners, co-workers, that has made your life in COVID a more positive experience?

RANDALL 00:21:09

The camper (*laughs*) is the big one, that's a big part of my own personal narrative from now on is the camper situation. The university also gave me and my partner emergency funding, which went along with the camper.

So part of the problem with the camper is that we had to put a heater in it and try to heat it because it was cold. The power bill was astronomical to try to heat it and so we were broke at this point. I've lost, you know, two thirds of my income. And this power bill was a problem, so the university was able to channel funding to me for that. That was really smooth, I was able to just fill out a form and said, This is what's going on. I don't know if I qualify for this. But this is what's going on. I can't afford to pay this power bill, if this much money would help. And they were able to do that. My mother has been able to help. She's a teacher in the Highline School District. She had tips for our daughter's remote online learning. My daughter is also in what we call, an after school enrichment program called Rainier Scholars that they do, they give them accelerated curriculum, and they make them do extra homework basically. They help them get into better schools and raise their grades. It's actually a really great program. And they had some extra resources too, they sent us masks, and they made sure that the kids had computers that would connect to the internet and had good cameras and all that kind of stuff. They've set up Google Scholar classroom modules to go through the classroom stuff that they were doing, and they've been really supportive of the kids and in keeping them academically challenged, during a time that it's been really difficult for kids to stay academically challenged, or even in a classroom in any sense, digital or otherwise.

MARSHALL 00:23:36

In addition to that, you've received a lot of help from your friends and your family, which is always amazing during this time of instability and struggle. What constraints would you say that COVID-19 has placed on your relationships?

RANDALL 00:23:48

I play soccer in my spare time when I'm not in school or at work or working crazy hours. I'm on a soccer team with a bunch of--They're actually quite a bit younger than I am. They're all in their early thirties. That's a big community for me and because we haven't been able to play soccer, I've not completely lost touch with all those people, but I haven't been connected to those people, and it's been hard to force. I've found out how introverted I actually am. Because I don't do that, I don't make the first call. I don't send a text message and be like, How are you? Are you guys surviving? How are you guys doing? Do you have work?, and all that community care (*laughs*) I really should be doing. Some of the other guys are better at it than I am. But that's something that suffered a lot, those connections that I don't need to make, because of COVID have suffered. We were supposed to go see--I think my dad was thinking about coming up here, he lives in Arizona, and that wasn't able to happen. There's like all kinds of little things like that, we're missing connections with family and friends, too. That's been difficult. And then being stuck in the house with everybody at the same time. We've done a pretty good job. I think all five of us have a good rapport. And that makes it easier, but it is challenging to not have somebody go away, like we're always in each other's space all the time. That can be difficult sometimes. But we're all just getting used to it together.

MARSHALL 00:25:42

Absolutely. COVID-19 has had a large effect on social mental health, and people not being able to see each other. You said that you realized that you had become more introverted. Do you feel like your social health and your mental health have declined at all as a result of COVID-19 and being able to see fewer people?

RANDALL 00:26:03

I'm not sure if it's declined, or if it's been illuminated, where like, Oh, I didn't realize that this was a thing that I do, or I didn't realize that this was something about me that maybe I should work on, or maybe I should understand about myself, but it's definitely brought to light that introvertedness that I didn't really think I had. After all those years of bartending, I think I would have thought of myself as charismatic and using interpersonal relationships. But when this happened it was like, I'm just going to be in my little shell now, and everybody's going to leave me alone. And I didn't realize that I didn't reach out, I didn't feel the same kind of

need to connect to people. We have another friend that we work with. She really, really struggled because before the pandemic it was, There's a barbecue over at her house every weekend, and she's always going over to someone else's house and hanging out. She really, really struggled because she thrived off of socializing with people. So to see this kind of contrast, where it's like, Oh, wow, I'm so much different than this other person, and the way that I'm handling this--This isn't good for me. I know it's not good for me, but I am not losing a grip on my connectedness to my own mental health that she was. In that sense, it had made it clear that there was something about how I connect with people and how other people connect with people too, that probably wouldn't have been clear if we were able to balance whatever social interaction we needed at the moment.

MARSHALL 00:27:49

It's very interesting to see how COVID-19 has this silver lining that lets people learn about themselves and how they really are around other people. Because we can socialize more now, I've been meeting people, and everybody has something to say about what they've learned about themselves as a result of COVID-19. It's very revealing.

RANDALL 00:28:11

That's a great way of putting it. It's very revealing. I agree with that.

MARSHALL 00:28:18

Do you think Seattle as a community has changed because of COVID-19? Do people seem colder or friendlier? Or is there not really any change?

Randall Rodriguez 00:28:27

No, I think there's a change. It's gotten more friendly. And I think that the mentality has been like, We're all in this together. I know that you're having the worst time of your life, I'm having the worst time of my life too, and we can kind of commiserate. But there's been way less human contact. Working in the service industry, there's a lot of physical contact, and then maybe this is something else that was illuminated to me that I didn't realize how often it happened, but you see people hugging and kissing each other on the cheeks and all this physical contact, sharing drinks. All of these things sound hideous now, because we've spent the last eighteen months training each other to keep our mouths and noses away from one another. And that part has changed. I think for some people, it will definitely feel a lot more cold because there isn't actual physical contact going on, but I think there's a lot better understanding between people, if that makes sense. A lot less--Not narcissism, because that's maybe too strong a word, but that same sort of only being able to orient the way I'm thinking through the scope of myself, if that makes sense. More sense of community.

MARSHALL 00:29:51

I've noticed that personally, I've become more understanding and empathetic. It's really this feeling of having basically the whole world experiencing the same thing, the same struggles. That's very humbling and also very sad.

RANDALL 00:30:09

Yeah. *(laughs)* In equal measure.

MARSHALL 00:30:14

You and I share the same responsibility of being UW students and I'm sure we both had very similar experiences. If you could describe a little bit about how COVID-19 has affected your school experience, has it made learning more difficult, is there anything you feel you've missed out on?

RANDALL 00:30:30

I think it's made learning a lot more difficult. Some of that, too, is dependent on professors, because our professors are people also. And some of them thrive on that, having a conversation, putting the chairs in the circle, and really hashing something out, and some of them thrive on, I'm just going to put this PowerPoint up here, and we're going to try to understand it. Or some professors are really tech-savvy, and they're really excited to like, Oh, let's use this new platform and see where we can--Let's put Zoom through its paces and see what we can do with it. It's been challenging in that sense then too for that part of academia. But as far as learning I did alright, grade-wise, I was able to make my way through it being remote. But I definitely miss going to a physical classroom and feeling like--Not a sense of (*exhales*) duty, but like a temporal sense of being party to something like, I have to be in this room at this time in order to accomplish these things. And staying organized, I didn't realize that I organize things like that, like I have to be in Padelford Hall by 11:05, in order to be in this class. And by not having that I forget where I'm supposed to be or what I'm doing or what day it is a little bit easier. I've managed to make it to all my classes. But there have been times where I'm like, Wait a minute, which Zoom link am I signing into? I don't know how anonymous I'm supposed to be but I live in West Seattle. We also closed the West Seattle Bridge and there is a little bit of a silver lining there. I'm really glad (*laughs*) that I didn't have to commute to the university while driving around the bridge and adding another forty minutes to my commute. Whenever I'm starting to get down on myself about like, Oh, I just want to go sit on my little table and watch people walk by and eat my little cured meats and cheeses. I have to remind myself, I'm saving a forty five minute drive there and back too.

MARSHALL 00:32:54

Yes, that you are. The bridge has been a problem. Hopefully they can fix it. So you don't work remotely. But you do have to do school remotely. Did you find that having to do your school at home made it more challenging to focus and be a part of the classroom?

RANDALL 00:33:15

Sometimes yes, sometimes no. But one of the things that really worked for me is--My partner and my mother-in-law set up this little space that I'm in right now. It's a tiny little offshoot of our kitchen that we used for storage and some plants and stuff like that, and they put together a little desk and some shelves for some books and stuff. And having an office, quote unquote, to come to helps keep it organized. But every once in a while, yeah, the dogs will run by and start barking and it interrupts class. We also put a desk in for my daughter in her bedroom. So her space got invaded a little bit by her schooling also. And we're both in school basically at the same time, so we go off into our own little corners of the house and do our thing. Every once in a while we have to come together and she has to come and ask me something or I have to find whatever--A stapler is that she's stolen or some sort of thing and we interact in that way. So yes and no, challenges and also little new techniques to make it work. But everybody's doing that. Especially people at the university, other students and other professors have all been really understanding when somebody has a problem. We get it. We all have it. We're all trying to find a place to do our studies and read our books and get on our Zoom meetings and be able to communicate with each other and have the bandwidth emotionally or through our modems to contribute to class. But we all know. So that's another part of that, we're all (*laughs*) having the worst time of our lives together like the thing that you were talking about. Just knowing, at some point, everybody's going to have a connectivity issue, and we're just going to roll with the punches.

MARSHALL 00:35:18

Your statement about the bandwidth of emotion, and about the bandwidth of the modem are both very important. If you have an internet connection, but you're not connected to your class, you're not going to learn anything. And with that, a lot of people have gotten Zoom fatigue, where they're tired of sitting at their computer for hours every day, and doing the same thing. I feel burnt out. Did you ever feel burnt out and if so, when?

RANDALL 00:35:47

Yeah, at the very beginning, I would definitely get burnt out. And I always have grand designs, like, I have my three classes today, I'm going to go to all of them, and then I got to get this book read this afternoon. And then by the time I was done with the class, I can't--I can't even face the music right now. I just need to go sit in the garden, or do something else, or, you know--I can't make my mind do this anymore. I got used to it after a little while and the fatigue wasn't quite as bad. I also wear reading glasses. So I got some reading glasses that are blue light filters. *(door creaks)* And who knows if that's maybe a placebo effect, but I felt like that helps to where I just wasn't not fatigued. I didn't not experience any fatigue, but it was a little bit better and I could manage it *(background noise)* a little bit better by doing that. So who knows? I would recommend anybody to try it, and even if it is just a psychological trick, it works. *(laughs)*

MARSHALL 00:36:48

I started wearing those blue light glasses too, because my eyes were hurting a lot from all the staring at the screen. And it's been a year now since we've been doing this, so I think they're a good investment. Did you ever feel not challenged by COVID-19? Or did you feel more challenged by the educational aspects of it? Was it more difficult to be involved in your classes and to complete your work?

RANDALL 00:37:15

I think it was more challenging, more difficult to be in my classes and complete my work. And I think a lot of that, like I said, had to do with organization. It was a lot more difficult to stay organized while doing that, but it was also a lot more difficult to be as invested. I'm right by the teapot and I can just run over there really quick and no one's even going to notice. It's not like being in a classroom where you can't just get up and go make yourself a cup of tea in a classroom. You're there, you're stuck there, you might as well focus on what's happening. So yeah, I think it's been difficult. *(laughs)* I've learned new techniques. Let's say that.

MARSHALL 00:38:04

I've also struggled to stay motivated, especially in the last couple of weeks. But hopefully, in the future, we'll have, again, the separation of work, home, and school, and we'll be able to go in-person to campus. I'm very much hoping for that. Another question for the school. How do you think COVID-19 will affect the future of education? More specifically, higher education?

RANDALL 00:38:31

I think that at the very least, the cultural conception of online schooling will be more accepted. There's a credibility thing that goes along with online schooling where there's a sense that it's not as credible. *(background noise)* And I think that that's going to evaporate, at least a little bit. I'm hoping that big universities, like the one that we're at, are going to start looking at remote learning as another tool in the tool shed to maybe implement when you need it. Maybe people that don't have temporal access, like international students--And I can't even imagine how challenging that is to be waking up at five o'clock in the morning to take a class. But those are tools that maybe will be used a little bit more, or at least viewed with more credibility than I think that they have been in the past. Because we've all seen, this isn't the best version of higher education that there is, but it is a version and it kind of works and people are still learning things. People are still getting something out of this. There's talk about how the corporate world is going to do that, like, We're not going to have offices anymore. Everybody's just going to Zoom in, we're not going to fly across the country to have a business meeting. We can just do it remotely and it works and we can save money by doing that. I think that that will happen to some extent, and in higher education too.

MARSHALL 00:40:09

Thank you for your answers to those questions. I'm going to get into the general personal questions now, especially for very touchy topics. We're going to start with face masks again. Are you tired of wearing a face mask?

RANDALL 00:40:22

No. I've just gotten used to it. The one time we've gotten back to practicing soccer, the soccer team. It's hard to [wear a face mask] when I full scratch, practicing really hard. It's the first time that I felt challenged wearing a face mask. But other than that, no. I think I'm going to, for now, at least keep wearing one. And when I'm out.

MARSHALL 00:40:52

Wearing the face mask has been necessary. But as it gets hotter, I've noticed it's gotten harder to wear them. But we have to do what's best for other people, of course. What do you think about those anti-maskers? And have you ever personally had first-hand experience with one of those people?

RANDALL 00:41:14

I think the people that I've had the experience with, it's definitely been a component of (*door creaks*) displaying personal politics more than it was (*door creaks*) worrying about like--Wasn't somebody going, Oh, I'm not really worried about my health, it was somebody worrying about like, No, I vote a certain way. (*background noise*) Whereas I just don't want my fluids going somewhere. Those interactions have been-- (*background noise*) They can (pauses) harbor a little anxiety. But after a few of them I just get used to them and, well, that's just how that person is going to be. And there's not a whole lot that I can do about it, except from trying to avoid their spray zone or something like that. (*laughs*)

MARSHALL 00:42:10

I don't want to be in the splash zone. I've noticed a lot, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, there are lots of videos of Karens going to stores and freaking out. I feel like there'd be a new one every day. But now you don't really see this anymore. Maybe those people have just gotten used to it, or stopped vocalizing.

RANDALL 00:42:34

I know that happened to my partner a lot. She's a customer service manager, so she's the front and face of the store. If you have a problem, she's the person that you're talking to. Early on, there were people spitting and throwing things at her. It was really awful. But it's kind of subsided for the most part now too. I mean, people when they are acting--They're being jerks. It's not quite as overt. If they're insisting on not wearing a mask, it's not quite as bad as spitting and throwing things. They might still be obnoxious, but maybe not a physical threat.

MARSHALL 00:43:19

You've already described some challenges, what would you describe has been the most challenging part of life during the pandemic for you?

RANDALL 00:43:30

Trying to juggle a new form of work while this is going on. I had worked in grocery before, for a really short time, I think maybe six months. But trying to learn how to work in grocery again, while it's changing all the time, while I'm used to being a bartender, while I'm a student, I've had to build a lot of new skills very quickly. That was really challenging, and trying to be emotionally supportive of other people that are living in fear all the time. My partner is living in fear that she's going to bring something home and get her parents sick, and her parents live in fear that one of us is going to bring something home and get them sick. Trying to overcome the fear of uncertainty has been the most challenging thing, I think.

MARSHALL 00:44:27

How do you think people should respond and act towards this fear of uncertainty and this general anxiety that they have about other people? (*door creaks*) When I see it, it seems very damaging and worrisome for the future.

Randall Rodriguez 00:44:45

I wish I had an answer for that. I don't know. Yeah, it's, (*laughs*) I can feel my heart rate go up when I get this social anxiety from fear. I haven't lived in fear very much in my life. I'm a big, scary bartender who throws people out at midnight every night. That's not a common experience for me. I don't live in terror of what I'm going to bring home and who I'm going to have to watch suffer. And so, yeah, I don't know what the answer is, but it's definitely something that we all--Whatever that answer is, it's a skill that we're all going to have to cultivate a lot better going forward.

MARSHALL 00:45:36

Yeah, it's definitely a big question. I did not mean to put you on the spot.

RANDALL 00:45:39

(*laughs*) That's okay. We've got to be asking that question so that we get an answer, right?

MARSHALL 00:45:45

Absolutely. It'll be interesting to see how COVID-19 affects our politics, and just our general well-being over the next several decades. I'm very interested and also worried to see what will happen. You said that the pandemic taught you about your stronger introvertedness? What has it also taught you about the community you live in, and the people that you live around?

RANDALL 00:46:13

One of the things that I've noticed is that identity politics is really way more important to the way people make themselves up, or think about themselves than I thought it was. I don't think that's part of the pandemic. I mean, I think the pandemic has laid bare a bunch of things like that. You have an opportunity to wear your ideology on your face, literally, and figuratively, now. And that's an odd social experiment that's going on. The community, I think that the greater Seattle area--We always like to pat ourselves on the back that we do a good job. But I think we do, and the community has gotten a lot smaller too, because we're not going--I'm not able to leave West Seattle, because there's a bridge out, but I'm not doing that anyway. I'm not going up to Shoreline, I'm not going and getting coffee in Bellevue with a friend or something like that. And so the communities get much smaller as the pressures of staying in and staying away. Like the people that shop at our grocery store. They didn't shop at three or four grocery stores, they shopped at one. They narrowed it down so that they knew if something happened, where it came from, and I think that that made the communities smaller, and maybe exposed things about people to each other, but also made people care a little bit more about their smaller version of a community, as opposed to saying like, Well, I'm a Washingtonian, or something like that. You're a West Seattleite, for sure. That scope has gone way down, I think. And I could be wrong about that. But that's something that I've noticed.

MARSHALL 00:48:19

Since getting my new job, my community has basically been the three blocks that I live around because I live very close to my work, and I don't have to do much else. I agree with you that communities have felt smaller now. There's no reason to go downtown to go see a show, because there are no shows. (*laughs*) No reason. But we'll move on to the last section of questions.

How do you think life in America will continue once we return to normal? And will there ever be a normal as we've ever known?

RANDALL 00:48:59

I think largely no. I think that there's going to be some fundamental changes in our world, from here on out. I think that--Or I'd like to believe anyway, that during the flu season, people are going to wear masks. Maybe not everybody, but it's going to be something that we see. And it's not going to seem weird when we see it. We've been seeing it for a year and a half now. That's something that didn't happen before, and would have stuck out like, Oh, is this person a surgeon on their way to surgery or something like that. I think that is something that will change. I think there's going to be other things that change too. When we kind of briefly talked about the corporate world probably using digital technologies to have inter-company conversation. I think we'll see more of that too. I think we'll get used to the Zoom fatigue a little bit and be like, Well, we can use this tool in other ways. I think we'll see the internet, in scare quotes, with the [inaudible] _____ big version of the internet become even more a part of the way that we do things, whether it's business or education or something else. Like I was saying, with higher education, the change in credibility is going to happen I think, too.

MARSHALL 00:50:37

I can agree that everything feels more digitized now. Like you said, we don't have to fly across the country to do meetings. We'll do them over Zoom instead. This makes me think about Warren G. Harding's Return to Normalcy campaign in the 1920s. And it is 2021, so maybe we could say that history repeats itself?

RANDALL 00:50:57

Yeah, we definitely could.

MARSHALL 00:51:02

If you recall last summer about all the protests around Black Lives Matter and police brutality, among other issues. What effect do you think that COVID-19 has had in arousing people to political action against issues like structural racism, police brutality, and the ineffectiveness of the American federal government?

RANDALL 00:51:21

I think it's had--I hesitate to say a positive impact, because I don't want to say that a pandemic has been a good thing. I don't want to risk saying that. I think it's given people the opportunity to really examine what's going on in their society, and maybe in their smaller community too. As a bunch of us weren't able to go to work, we were able to get involved in politics that maybe we wouldn't have been involved in before. I can't remember who said it, there's a joke that--And this is an old, philosophy of politics kind of joke that people don't riot until they're starving. We were on the cusp of starving, and we started rioting. I'm painting with really, really broad strokes there. There were really bad things going on in our country, in the whole world, socially. It gave people the need for a political voice, or for a quieter political voice, to have the space to become louder. I think that that was a good thing. I would like to see more policy change off of movements like Black Lives Matter, or even the Me Too Movement, there needs to be way more change at the top end, policies and litigation and things like that in response to social movements. I think the social movement was--That was one of the goods that came from people having to stop going to work and pay attention to society for a minute and go wait a minute, this is not--We're letting this happen. This can't happen. We have to do something, whether it's go paint a picture on the sidewalk, or go stand in front of a building and protest, go and wear our masks in front of people that don't like it or something like that.

MARSHALL 00:53:26

I would agree that it has aroused an inner political being in a lot of people, especially because of not being able to go to work, many more people are free during the day. Last summer, that was definitely visible on the streets of Seattle.

RANDALL 00:53:41

I think when you get home from work, and you watch the six o'clock news and go like, Wow, that's awful, that's one thing. But it's still another level of separation and from seeing something happen live, being, you feel more like you're--Even though you're watching it through a screen or something like that. When there's less break from whatever kind of current event is happening, you feel like you're part of the current event. And we all feel like we're part of this strange current event where we're navigating a pandemic, right? It's a lot easier to feel that those things as they happen, these social, (*background noise*) political things, when they happen, they feel relevant to the individual. They feel like they're happening to us, as opposed to something that we're watching on the news.

MARSHALL 00:54:32

Do you think that COVID-19 ability to separate people from one another also increased people's need to be together in a political sense, their search for community?

RANDALL 00:54:49

It would make sense that you would be looking for some sort of connection to other people (*background noise*) and go like, Well, there's this political connection. There's these like minded other people that are part of this other movement that makes sense for me to get involved in that. I think that makes sense that that would be an avenue that people who needed some kind of interpersonal connection would look at and would also feel important. Not to denigrate joining a bridge club, but it's not like joining (*background noise*) a bridge club. It's something that you feel by joining, you would feel like you had skin in the game. (*door creaks*)

MARSHALL 00:55:38

For our final question, what are some lessons to be learned from COVID-19, that Americans and America can do better in the future?

RANDALL 00:55:50

There's a lot of those, right? I think the speed with which we react to things was late, we saw was way too slow. And to balance our sense of civil liberties versus what is best for the person next to us, is something that we should be better at after this. I don't know that we will be. I think that's a lesson that we really should learn. Instead of going like, What am I allowed to do, rather than what's going to make Jeff next door risk getting sick or being arrested or any of those things, trying to think about how our action or inaction affects other people. On a global scale, we had so many more cases, we had a quarter of the number of cases in the world at one point, the one thing that we were leading the world in was confirmed COVID-19 cases. We're a fifth of the world's population. How are we so bad at that? We can be better at that. I think some of that comes from going like, It's not about me, it's about all of us. Maybe?

MARSHALL 00:57:10

Absolutely, I totally agree. And with that, this interview is now complete. I would like to thank you for answering these questions in a thoughtful manner. I appreciate it so much, and thank you for your time.

RANDALL 00:57:22

Thank you, Marshall.